

February 23, 2016

RE: HB5232 / SB720

Distinguished Ladies and Gentleman,

Let me introduce myself. I am an architect, planner, and urbanist in Grand Rapids, Michigan. My middle-class family resides in Heritage Hill, one of the largest and oldest historic districts in the state of Michigan. My wife, three school-aged children, and I live in a house that was constructed in 1913. Our house has, over its life, been chopped into apartments, been the victim of disinvestment, and been plagued with poor maintenance. It has drafty windows, sloped floors, and sometimes pieces of its 100-year old stucco veneer just fall off.

We love our house. We chose our house because of, not only its character, but also because of the character of all the other houses in the neighborhood. All of these individual historic structures, together, make a great place - the kind of place that we desire to live, work, play, and raise a family in.

As I mentioned, the house has needed, and continues to need, some TLC. Over the last 12 years, with the support and guidance of our local historic standards and commission, we have given it that TLC. We have painstakingly rehabilitated the old drafty windows, restored it to a single-family residence, repaired the stucco, and made numerous other investments that have not only made the house more livable, but also restored its inherent beauty and intrinsic value. These investments of both time and money were not cheap, but we made them, because we knew that the stability of the neighborhood would give us a return on those investments. And it has.

We made these investments because of the predictability provided by the Secretary of Interior Standards, our local preservation guidelines, and our local preservation commission. Without this local layer of predictability, we likely would not have made these investments, and also likely would not have even chosen to live and raise our family in the district to begin with.

We also made these investments because we believe that this house, this neighborhood, and our city will be elevated by our small investment.

We believe that without the option to choose to live in one of these historically-designated urban neighborhoods that fewer people will choose to live in the city. Thus creating yet more instability and disinvestment within the economic and cultural centers of our state. Ultimately, we believe that our city is better, because of these districts and the predictability of these districts.

Keep in mind, that we, like almost every one of our neighbors, chose this place to build a life around, to invest in, and to live our American dream. We chose this place, with full understanding of what we were getting.

Now, to my dismay, I am spending time writing a letter, to urge you to kill a bill that threatens my property rights, under the guise of protecting property rights. Irony to be sure, and frankly, very disappointing state leadership.